

## MLS Retirees

### BOOTS HUNG UP EARLY

Richard Farrer has tried to attend two games since retiring from the Dallas Burn in mid-June. Before one, he was honored as a seven-year member of the team and received a warm ovation from the Cotton Bowl faithful. The other he left early, unable to bear sitting in the stands, perfectly healthy, while his former teammates battled.

"I didn't stay long," Farrer said. "It was just too tough to watch. But I keep up on the Internet and I read the papers every day and root for the guys."

Farrer, 31, is one of four MLS players who have retired in the middle of this season. Colorado's Imad Baba, 28, retired June 16, and Todd Yeagley, 29, and Mike Lapper, 31, traded their Columbus Crew jerseys for front-office positions with the club on June 25 and July 11, respectively. Both Crew defenders pointed to ongoing injury struggles as the primary reason for their decisions.

"We're dropping like flies," Farrer said jokingly. "There's definitely a move within the league toward the next generation of players, the younger players, but I don't feel as though there's any conspiracy to drive [the older players] out. It was not that way in my case, at least."

Farrer left to attend law school at the University of Texas — a career path he had long planned to follow after soccer.

"For me, the timing was the most difficult part of the decision," Farrer said. "Up until I announced my retirement, I was still playing and contributing, so I didn't feel like I was leaving. But I had a choice of either leaving midseason or having eight or nine months without a job until school started next fall."

Baba cited economic reasons for his departure. He was waived by the Rapids in January, then picked up again at what he called "a 50 percent pay cut." Baba said he wanted to quit before the season and return to his hometown of Houston but could not because his wife, Suzie, was in a Denver hospital with a difficult pregnancy. He is now working with his brother, Nidal, in a nutrition store business in Texas.

"It was just really discouraging the way everything was handled," Baba said. "I still miss the game of soccer, but I didn't really have a choice. If I didn't have this business to fall back on, I would have probably foreclosed on my house in Denver, and my wife would have been without insurance at the wrong time."

— **Will Kuhns**